

D&D Fiction

Oroon Rising, Part 12

by Ed Greenwood



Chapter 12: Mindriding So Cold

The eerie green glow of the spell that was reassembling the splintered shards of his fingerbones still flickered around his hands, but Brethniir of the Brazen Tower could wait no longer.

In an urgency he'd not felt for centuries, he spun the swiftest spell he'd cast in a very long time.

The usual sensation of silently falling through blue mists washed over him, and when it fell away he was...

Back in the chamber where he'd been talking with Kadreth, standing beside his seat with the polished table in front of him and the gently-drifting cluster of surviving scrying spheres off to his left, at one end. There was no sign of the Worm That Walks.

Good! He'd managed to return first.

The lich sat down hurriedly, leaning back in his chair in a pose that suggested he'd never moved from it, and peered at the spheres with the fixed intensity that served an ever-grinning skull for a frown.

He was just in time.

Empty air flickered, glowed, and blossomed into a spinning, rising radiance that became Kadreth Whitecloak, slithering forward to his own seat.

"Well," he uttered with a grim hissing, "I read, and pieced together a few hints that hadn't meant much until now. My library's large, but holds little about yon phantoms. Yet I know who we're facing."

Brethniir nodded, spreading one bony hand in a 'speak on' gesture.

"There came a time when a family of very accomplished sorcerers seized rule over all other Staelen with their spells—and threats of using them to work murder—until the survivors capitulated. They carried out almost a hundred of those threats before that capitulation came."



The lich nodded. “That family was the house of Oroon.”

Kadreth leaned forward. “Yesss. So you’ve heard of them. What else do you know?”

“Nothing. The relevant mentions in all the tomes in my library amount to but one passage: ‘the proud house of Oroon rule the Staelen people.’ I’ve always wondered who or what the Oroon were.”

The Worm That Walks sat back with a hissing sigh. “And still do, of course—as do I, on this side of the table. We can readily see they’ve cheated death in their own fashion, attaining some sort of near-immortality. Which means their magic probably far outstrips ours.”

The lich nodded again. “So much is obvious. I know not if I prefer their road to eternity much over ours. Wraithdom means one can never touch things, or hold or possess or even move something as small as a pebble from place to place.”

Kadreth leaned forward again. “They can do that through living creatures, possessing and controlling them as if the captive bodies were their own.”

Brethniir drummed his fingertips on the glossy tabletop. “With ease, it appears. Their spells or their natures allow them to invade and control living minds. Our minds, too?”

Kadreth shrugged, several small worms tumbling to the table. “That probably depends,” he hissed, “on how strong our minds are.”

Which brought down a silence that stretched uncomfortably, as the last two archmages of the Nine stared at each other across the polished tabletop.

Jallana screamed, or tried to. Her shrieking was a silent knife within her, echoing raw and hoarse and searing inside—while her half-smiling lips moved not at all, her ears heard not the slightest outcry, and she strolled across the chamber with indolent ease, her limbs moved by Darrance Oroon.

You are not one of those whose minds are so feeble as to collapse at my arrival, so you may as well finish with that futility.

His cold, ice-sharp mind-voice sounded more bored than angry, and Jallana trembled. Inwardly; her body was in such a powerful thrall that she couldn’t even make her own muscles quiver.

Helplessly she watched her hands rise, sketching out swift, intricate gestures in the air as her lips murmured words she did not know, and a chill tingling surged through her: the coldness of the Oroon who’d invaded her.

The spell she cast was his, her body only a tool moved by his will. When it was done, Jallana felt her bare feet leaving the floor, as the tingling that was his sentience surged inside her, willing her to rise up and fly.

In another silent moment she was drifting through the air like a wraith—like the Oroon—and would have been

more awed at doing so if she hadn't been so frightened. Cold fear stabbed and coiled, billowing up chokingly behind her throat, where—

Stop that.

Darrance Oroon sounded more calm and firm than irritated. Hard on the heels of his mind-voice something quelled her fear, dulling and crushing it down so that it still seethed and roiled, but as faintly as if someone had closed a door on it.

She was flying, arrowing face-first down the shaft she'd fallen down earlier, into a few lingering wisps of dust that made her nose and eyes prickle; unbidden into Jallana's mind, sharp and strong, came her remembered last glimpses of her garments and gear, settling through her to the floor.

She was going to retrieve them. The Oroon was making her do so. It—he—no, she told herself fiercely, through a mental gale of mocking Oroon laughter, it—was riding her mind, plucking forth the memories it wanted to show her, moving her limbs regardless of what she wanted....

Her body belonged to it.

She was... she was Jallana, she reminded herself firmly. Jallana.

A nice name, to be sure. The cold, heavily-echoing voice mocked her as the chill tingling behind it strengthened into a crushing, all-deadening fog in her mind that dulled her anger into half-remembered confusion and left her powerless to do more than watch.

Watch and feel: feeling unfamiliar wisps and the flickering of scenes swirling in the cold mind-mist, memories not her own. Oroon memories.

There were many Oroon, most of them younger than Darrance—but all of them ancient when measured against the fleeting lives of mortals.

He was not the greatest of his kind, Darrance, but he regarded his younger kin with a contempt that slashed and burned, sneering at their stupidity, selfish recklessness, refusal to consider consequences... fools like Marrune, Darrance's angry mind snarled, were so little superior to the cattle whose minds they rode that they scarcely deserved to be able to mindride—or suck life-force from their unwilling hosts.

Cattle like me, Jallan thought savagely, unable even to sob as she reached for her fallen war-harness. Cattle like me.